

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 4519

E.O. 11652 GDS
TAGS PDIP, PEPR, AR, RO
SUBJECT ARGENTINE NAVY CHIEF MASSERA TO VISIT ROMANIA

1. ARGENTINE NAVY COMANDER IN CHIEF AND JUNTA MEMBER ADMIRAL EMILIO MASSERA PLANS TO VISIT ROMANIA AT THE END OF JUNE. HIS TRIP, WHICH HAS BEEN DISCUSSED IN THE PRESS, WILL INCLUDE SOME OTHER COUNTRIES, POSSIBLY ITALY AND SPAID. LA NACION, REFERRING TO MASSERAS UPCOMING TRIP IN A JUNE 11 COLUMN, OBSERVED THAT IT IS NOTABLE FOR TWO REASONS: 1) IT WILL MARK THE FIRST TRIP OF A RANKING ARGENTINE MILITARY OFFICER TO A COMMUNIST COUNTRY IN MANY YEARS; AND 2) SIGNIFICANTLY, ROMANIA IS INDEPENDENT ENOUGH FROM MOSCOW TO MAINTAIN DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH CHILE AND TO PLAY A CERTAIN ROLE IN MIDDLE EASTERN MATTERS AS A BRIDGE TO TEL AVIV.

2. MASSERA AND HIS AIDES HAD PREVIOUSLY INFORMED EMBOFFS OF THE ADMIRALS PROPOSED TRIP TO ROMANIA.
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PAGE 02 BUENOS 04519 122153Z

THEY PARTICULARLY WISHED TO HIGHLIGHT MASSERAS INTEREST IN ROMANIA AS A FACTOR IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND IMPLIED THAT MASSEA WOULD WELCOME USG "SUPPORT" FO HIS CALLS AND INTERESTS IN THAT AREA.

3. MASSERA IS A CHARISMATIC, OPPORTUNISTIC MAN

WITH STRONG PERSONAL POLITICAL AMBITIONS IN ARGENTINA. IN AN ARRANGEMENT WITHIN THE ARGENTINE RULING JUNTA, MASSERA WILL STEP DOWN AS NAVY COMMANDER IN CHIEF PROBABLY IN SEPTEMBER AND WILL RETIRE TO PRIVATE LIFE. HE HAS, HOWEVER, ALREADY BEEN ACTIVELY COURTING LABOR, POLITICAL PARTY, AND OTHER GROUPS AND APPARENTLY INTENDS TO MAKE A BID FOR THE ARGENTINE PRESIDENCY ONCE HE IS RETIRED. (ARGENTINE MILITARY PREROGATIVES BEING WHAT THEY ARE, A FAR MORE POWERFUL ARMY COULD NEVER COUNTENANCE A NAVY OFFICER AS PRESIDENT, ESPECIALLY WHILE THE COUNTRY IS BEING RULED BY AN ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY TRUMVERATE.)

4. MASSERAS VISIT TO BUCHAREST, THEREFORE, SHOULD BE SEEN IN LIGHT OF HIS POLITICAL ASPIRATIONS AT HOME. A WELL-PUBLICIZED SUCCESSFUL VISIT TO BUCHAREST WOULD HELP THRUST HIM UP INTO THE "INTERNATIONAL STATESMAN" CATEGORY, AN IMPORTANT AND USEFUL CREDIT FOR AN ASPIRING ARGENTINE LEADER. AS THE ARGENTINE ARMY LEADERS AND THE CURRENT PRESIDENT, GENERAL VIDELA, ARE LITTLE KNOWN OUTSIDE THE AMERICAS, MASSERA, EVER THE CANNY AND ASTUTE POLITICIAN, WOULD HAVE HIMSELF FILLING THE VACUUM AS THE "ARGENTINE PRESENCE" IN EUROPE, THE THIRD WORLD AND HE MIDDLE EAST.

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 BUENOS 04519 122153Z

5. MASSERA IS FASCINATING BUT MANIPULATIVE; WE UNDERSTAND HE FINAGLED THE INVITATION TO BUCHAREST. CLEARLY THE LA NACION COUMNIST PLAYED HIS PART BY POINTING OUT THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MASSERAS TRIP AND THE IMPORTANCE OF ROMANIA AS A FORCE IN THE THIRD WORLD AND MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT. WHAT MASSERAS CHANCES ARE AS A FUTURE PRESIDENT OF ARGENTINA ARE TOO CLOUDY AT PRESENT FOR US TO MAKE PREDICTIONS. HE AND HIS AIDES HAVE EAGERLY SOUGHT CONTACTS AND APPROVAL FROM US OFFICIALS; SHOULD HE SEEK TO EXPLOIT A US CONNECTION ON HIS TRIP, WE RECOMMEND HE BE TREATED GRACIOUSLY AND WITH CAUTION.
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